DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 463 257 SP 040 549

AUTHOR Walker Hopp, Carolyn
TITLE Developing the Capacity for Interactive Professionalism through Mentoring and Principle-Centered Action.
PUB DATE 2002-02-00
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (54th, New York, NY, February 23-26, 2002).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Teacher Induction; College Faculty; Faculty Development; *Instructional Leadership; *Mentors; Middle School Teachers; Middle Schools; *Partnerships in Education; *Teacher Collaboration
IDENTIFIERS *Principles Approach; University of Central Florida

ABSTRACT

The work of mentoring educational professionals includes establishing strong models to help educators and potential education leaders define operating principles that guide their professional work. The University of Central Florida partners with several public schools in developing models of mentoring. Teaching faculty at the college work directly with public schools to mentor beginning teachers and renew those who serve as mentors. One partnership school, Horizon Middle School (HMS), focuses on mentoring in cohorts. The HMS mentoring model provides an example of how mentoring and principle-centered action converge in interactive professionalism. The process began with the establishment of a foundation of beliefs and guiding principles about teaching and learning. The HMS principle-centered action required dynamic leadership and committed faculty. HMS teachers and administrators worked together to develop operating principles. After revising several drafts, they adopted a final version. Five appendixes include: an overview of operating principles concept; HMS operating principles draft one; HMS operating principles drafts with input from faculty and staff; HMS operating principles final version; and HMS operating principles with defining statements. (SM)

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Carolyn Walker Hopp, Ph.D.
University of Central Florida
College of Education
Orlando, FL 32816

Presentation to the
54th Annual Meeting
American Association of
Colleges for Teacher Education
February, 2002

SP040549

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Developing the Capacity for Interactive Professionalism through Mentoring and Principle-Centered Action

The empowerment of teachers to create and maintain professional standards, and to work together in nurturing environments in which professionals are mentored and coached, has created conflicting expectations of behavior. In empowering practicing professionals, the challenge to SCDEs is to provide a pathway to continuous dialogue about professional practice. It is essential that this dialogue have as its foundation operating principles that promote the highest expectations of professional behavior, and that consistently ask teachers to reflect on and explore their teaching selves. Those who prepare pre-service professionals should not assume that there are not experiences that have a significant impact on personal and professional action. If teaching professionals do not have a clear sense of how they are influenced by their experiences and ideals, their practice may not ever be impacted by these important frames of reference (Darling-Hammond, 1999).

Moving From a Traditional View

Fullan (1993) suggested that teacher education programs engage teaching candidates in dialogue that will help create links to the moral purpose that influences them with the tools that will prepare them to engage in productive change. Fullan also noted the dichotomy between those teachers who demonstrate a clear sense of purpose and become disheartened, and those with a limited sense of purpose that are seldom called upon to demonstrate their commitment.

Although colleges of education have traditionally prepared P-12 teachers to understand pedagogy in terms of child development (in elementary education teacher preparation), or to function within specific areas of content (in secondary education teacher preparation), there is a need for coherence in the approach to teacher preparation that includes working at a high level of professionalism based on operating principles. "The growth of any craft depends on shared practice and honest dialogue among people

who do it" (Palmer, 1998, p. 144). Palmer also suggested there were three elements essential to encouraging good talk about teaching that enhances both professional practice and the "selfhood from which it comes:" topics that go beyond technique; ground rules (principles) that keep us from defeating ourselves, and leaders who expect and invite us to join the conversation (p. 144).

Emerging research in mentoring discusses the success of teachers who continue in professional practice, and the relationship of that success to positive mentoring. Successful mentoring relationships include, for example, acknowledgement of philosophical differences, which have to be revealed and discussed. Discussions in research of mentoring refer to collaborative relationships that are based on the principle of trust. Hudson-Ross and McWhorter (1999) also listed essential elements of the mentoring relationship that refer to discovering the self that teaches (Palmer, 1998), including the recognition of experience, life history, and life demands that define the individual (Hudson-Ross and McWhorter, 1999, p. 164). Graham, Hudson-Ross, Adkins, McWhorter, and McDuffie-Stewart (1999) noted that trust, once defined by the individual, allows mentors and mentees to remain connected in the best of times and the worst of times. From trust come commitment and a sense of continuity. Mentoring relationships result in learning and growing together, knowing the self, making the commitment, and trusting the process.

Mentoring and principle-centered practice converge in the explicit elements of teaching, however, mentoring in its strongest sense takes place here. Experienced professionals, including those who play significantly important roles in pre-service teacher preparation, must encourage the notion of forming productive collaborations with colleagues, parents, and the learning community at large. Future teachers should feel equally well versed in conversations with their students as well as with others outside of the classroom about achieving results or making improvements in systems or practice. Fullan (1993) called this interactive professionalism. Teaching practice must also be

grounded in personal vision and beliefs about the work in which we engage, and in knowing our purpose for teaching.

The Leadership Factor

Oakley & Krug (1991) suggested, "Having the vision is not enough to bring about interactive professionalism or successful change. What is needed is *enlightened* leadership – leaders who have the ability to get members of the organization to accept ownership for that vision… Enlightened leadership is not so much about things *to do.* It is actually a state of *being*" (p. 19*)*. The mentoring of educational professionals should lay the foundation of enlightened leadership, but mentoring in the profession has suffered from the lack of systematic processes that afford opportunities for college faculty, beginning, and experienced teachers to have interactive dialogue about their professional practice, who they are as teachers, and what principles guide their day-to-day actions.

Teachers in schools have traditionally been the major source of school leadership. Preparing school leaders to engage in constructive dialogue should also emphasize principle-centered action. The work of mentoring educational professionals includes establishing strong models to help educators and potential educational leaders define operating principles that guide their professional work.

Principle-Centered Action

The University of Central Florida has partnered with several public schools in the development of models of mentoring. Teaching faculty at the college have worked directly with public schools in mentoring beginning teachers, and renewing those who serve as mentors. One partnership school model, Horizon Middle School, has focused on mentoring in cohorts that begins with establishing a foundation of beliefs and guiding principles about teaching and learning. Both experienced and beginning teaching professionals have engaged in dialogue about why they teach and what they bring to the profession.

The work included open articulation of beliefs about teaching and learning, and relating operating principles to work with colleagues and students. The goal of mentoring educational professionals should be to provide on-going opportunities for collaboration and collegiality that result in meaningful growth and consistent renewal in teaching practice An important goal of mentoring is also to foster understanding of the essential elements of teaching and learning. But there is also another essential part of the process: understanding of what drives our actions as teachers and as potential educational leaders.

Darling-Hammond (1997, 1999), and Palmer (1993, 1998) stressed facets of mentoring including disposition and qualities of the individual. In this time of political and social upheaval, and the ever-changing social context of school, coming to grips with our beliefs has become more and more important. College of education classes and seminars are filled with promising professionals whose life experiences are vastly different from those of many of the students they will teach. This lack of like-experiences is accompanied by belief systems about urban students and teaching in urban settings, for example, which are not fully informed.

Mentoring of educational professionals that promotes interactive dialogue about principle-centered action is essential to do what Darling-Hammond (1997) suggested teachers must be prepared to do: to undertake tasks that they have never before been called upon to accomplish in terms of rethinking and transforming their practice. Teachers need to constantly re-think and re-examine what they do and why they do it. Effective development of school professionals will need to provide opportunities to share beliefs, reveal differences, and converge philosophies and beliefs.

The Work of Centered Principles

The most effective way to demonstrate how mentoring and principle-centered action converge in interactive professionalism is to document the practice of teachers in schools. A mentoring model in HMS began to emerge three years ago, and evolved to an entire faculty working to define operating principles. The mentoring work began as a

process in which beginning teachers and mentors studied their own practice in order to know and be sure of what they believed about teaching and learning. HMS mentors, beginning teachers, pre-service teachers, and university faculty partners engaged in a journey of self-definition and discovery to determine what they believed in as teachers, and to understand how their beliefs affected daily practice. The mentoring process at HMS extended to the school faculty who engaged in working with beginning and pre-service teachers, and with each other in mentoring and teacher renewal.

Principle-centered action also requires dynamic leadership. The principal of HMS is an instructional leader whose faculty appreciates her ability to recognize teaching talent and potential. At HMS, there are very high expectations of faculty and students to pursue excellence. In her ruminations about her faculty, she referred to the operating principles as the foundation that guides teachers, staff, and students in their work and collaboration.

Defining principles that will guide the organization is an important step in what Hargreaves (1997) called reculturing schools. "How teachers work with teachers...affects how well they work with their students...cultures of teaching should be a prime focus for educational change" (Hargreaves, 1997, p. 1). It is important to note that the work of defining operating principles at HMS took place within a culture of teamwork and mentoring. In a recent discussion, a teacher of 8th grade math at HMS said, "Operating principles help define the environment you work in both academically and professionally. They define the culture of school and keep everyone on the same page in terms of expectations" (K, 2002).

Operating Principles – Close-up View of the Process

Prior to the return to school, second semester, 2000, the faculty at HMS met together for team building. As a researcher and university partner, I had worked with the faculty at HMS for two years. The principal invited me to facilitate an activity that would focus on collaboration and teamwork, and expressed that the strength of her faculty was their sense of team. As a faculty partner, the opportunity was unique in that I was able to

directly participate in an impactful process, as well as have a first-hand view of work on operating principles from development to implementation.

Facilitating conversation with the HMS faculty was not difficult. I had participated in numerous workshops that *addressed* operating principles, but did not *facilitate a process*. However, in my K-12 teaching experience, I had been part of a faculty that actually went through the process, very successfully. The work with HMS was as follows:

- teachers were introduced to a brief overview (Appendix A), prepared by the facilitator, that defined operating principles as a concept;
- the faculty and staff numbered 115, and were grouped in grade level teams (6^{th}, 7^{th}, and 8^{th}), as well as in administrative and staff teams (a total of 10 teams);
- in their teams, they were asked to list their "non-negotiables" in terms of working and collaborating in the learning environment on a day-to-day basis;
- the long list was narrowed to 5 or 6 items;
- each small list was posted in the professional development room for approximately two weeks for review;
- faculty and staff members were given "dots" (10 each) to place next to what they felt individually were the 10 *most important* operating principles;
- to ensure that each faculty and staff member was provided an opportunity to review the lists; a sign-in sheet was provided;
- after two weeks (and 90%) participation; the lists were reviewed and "dots" counted;

- the list was reduced to 13 items of importance that were identified by faculty and staff, typed by the media specialist, and provided to the faculty and staff for review.

HMS faculty and staff held a special meeting to review the first draft (Appendix B) of the HMS operating principles. Consensus was reached that a wordsmith team would work on continuity of expression. This team met several times and provided drafts to faculty and staff, which were responded to only if there were suggested additions or omissions. After several drafts (Appendix C), the final version of the HMS Operating Principles was presented to faculty and staff and adopted (Appendix D).

A Partner's Perspective

The work of SCDEs to engage pre-service professionals in conversations about beliefs and principles is indeed challenging. We are often reminded that our pre-service students are becoming younger and younger, and do not yet possess the capacity to have such "heady" conversations. However, the importance of developing understanding of one's own beliefs and purposes for teaching, as well as a sense of what will guide decisions about practice, cannot be overstated. What will best serve the pre-service professional is being guided in collaborative and interactive dialogue by colleges of education faculty who believe they will also benefit from the process.

There are, however, systems in place in SCDEs that provide opportunity for reflective activity, mostly through the portfolio process. But to engage in reflective and interactive dialogue means talking to each other openly about challenges, subject matter, teaching practices, thinking, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of the world (Senge, 2000). This dialogue must be guided by university faculty who acknowledge the need for pre-service professionals to develop their capacity to become critically engaged in their professional practice

Postscript

HMS revisited their operating principles after almost two years. The revisit was prompted by a perceived need by faculty and staff to rededicate themselves to the spirit of the operating principles, and to make sure that new and returning faculty held common understandings of their meaning. Faculty and staff held a retreat at the end of the 2001 school year. The purpose of the retreat was to review the operating principles and write statements that would describe what the principles "looked like" or "sounded like" in action. After two days of discussion and collaboration, and a repeat of the original process, descriptive statements were added to the original operating principles (Appendix E).

Faculty and staff at HMS acknowledge that the process was quite a journey. I have been asked on numerous occasions if these conversations are occurring in other schools, or in university classrooms. The answer: perhaps, but not consistently…and not nearly enough.

Appendix A

Overview of Operating Principles Concept

OPERATING PRINCIPLES...ENSURE HARMONY

What are Operating Principles?

- Values, mission, and vision that form the foundation for the work of the learning community/team;
- Agreed upon actions that affect how the learning community/team operates;
- They are SIMPLY stated to be understood by ALL;
- They work ONLY if **VISIBLE** and used in **EVERYDAY** activities and decisions;
- The entire learning community/team agrees to operate according to the principles they design;
- Any and all who work within - and enter - the learning community/team are bound by the agreed upon principles;
- All members of the learning community/team HONOR THE PRINCIPLES...and EACH OTHER.

Appendix B

HMS Operating Principles Draft #1

OPERATING PRINCIPLES...ENSURE HARMONY

We at Horizon Middle School are committed to working and collaborating together according to the following:

Our guiding principles are integrity, responsibility, respect, team, attitude, and success.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

- Give the dignity and respect that each person deserves.
- Maintain high expectations.
- Affirm growth areas and areas of strength while developing areas of weakness.
- Grow from your mistakes
- Support and recognize each other.
- Use humor.
- Laugh with each other and with the students.
- The best way to create an active learner is to *be an active learner.*
- Don't lose sight of the *big picture.*
- Acknowledge people's presence (even if just with a smile).
- Be willing to accept changes.
- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
- Decisions will always be based on what is best for students.

Appendix C

HMS Operating Principle Drafts

with

Input from Faculty and Staff

OPERATING PRINCIPLES...ENSURE HARMONY

We at Horizon Middle School are committed to working and collaborating together according to the following:

Our guiding principles are integrity, responsibility, respect, team, attitude, and success.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

1. ~~We must all~~ We support + recognize each other with dignity + respect. ~~Give the dignity and respect that each person deserves.~~
2. We Maintain high expectations.
3. ~~Affirm growth areas and areas of strength while developing areas of weakness.~~ We affirm our strengths while working on our weaknesses.
4. We Grow from your mistakes and we willing to accept changes
5. ~~Support and recognize each other.~~
6. We Use humor. and
7. Laugh with each other ~~and with the students.~~
8. ~~The best way to create an active learner is to be an active learner.~~ Teacher
4. We ~~don't lose~~ always keep sight of the *big picture.*
10. We Acknowledge ~~people's presence~~ the presence of others (even if just with a smile).
11. ~~Be willing to accept changes.~~
12. We Do unto others as ~~you~~ would have ~~them do~~ done unto ~~you.~~ us
13. Our Decisions will always be based on what is best for students. growth

8. We expect active learning because we are active learners.

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OPERATING PRINCIPLES...ENSURE HARMONY

We at Horizon Middle School are committed to working and collaborating together according to the following:

Our guiding principles are integrity, responsibility, respect, team, attitude, and success.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

- Give the dignity and respect that each person deserves.
- Maintain high expectations.
- Affirm growth areas and areas of strength while developing areas of weakness.
- Grow from your mistakes
- Support and recognize each other.
- Use humor.
- Laugh with each other and with the students.
- The best way to create an active learner is to *be an active* ~~learner~~ teacher.
- Don't lose sight of the *big picture.*
- Acknowledge people's presence (even if just with a smile).
- Be willing to accept changes.
- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
- Decisions will always be based on what is best for students growth

We use humor and laugh with each other.
We support each other with dignity and respect
We grow from our mistakes willing to accept changes
We expect active learning because we are active learners

Our

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OPERATING PRINCIPLES...ENSURE HARMONY

We at Horizon Middle School are committed to working and collaborating together according to the following:

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- Maintain high expectations.
- Affirm growth areas and areas of strength while developing areas of weakness.
- Grow from your mistakes
- Support and recognize each other.
- Use humor.
- Laugh with each other and with the students.
- The best way to create an active learner is to *be an active learner.*
- Don't lose sight of the *big picture.*
- Acknowledge people's presence (even if just with a smile).
- Be willing to accept changes.
- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
- Decisions will always be based on what is best for students.

Draft 1
HMS Operating Principles

1. We support and recognize each other with dignity and respect.
2. We maintain high expectations.
3. We affirm our strengths while working on our weaknesses.
4. We all grow from our mistakes and are willing to accept change.
5. We use humor and laugh with each other.
6. We embrace active learning because we are active learners.
7. We can see the *Big picture.*
8. We acknowledge the presence of others even if with just a smile.
9. Our decisions are based on what is best for student growth.
10. We always keep sight of the big picture.

Draft 2
HMS Operating Principles

1. We support and recognize each other with dignity and respect.
2. We maintain high expectations.
3. We affirm our strengths while working on our weaknesses.
4. We all grow from our mistakes and are willing to accept change.
5. We use humor and laugh with each other.
6. We embrace active learning because we are active learners.
7. We always keep sight of the *Big Picture.*
8. We acknowledge the presence of others ~~even if~~ with ~~just~~ simply a smile.
9. We maintain a safe and caring environment.
10. Our decisions are based on what is best for student growth.

Draft 3
HMS Operating Principles

1. We support and recognize each other with dignity and respect.
2. We maintain high expectations.
3. We affirm our strengths while working on our weaknesses.
4. We all grow from our mistakes and are willing to accept change.
5. We use humor and laugh with each other.
6. We embrace active learning because we are active learners.
7. We always keep sight of the *Big Picture.*
8. We acknowledge the presence of others; if simply with a smile.
9. We maintain a safe and caring environment.
10. Our decisions are based on what is best for student growth.

Appendix D

HMS Operating Principles

Final Version

Horizon Middle School

Operating Principles

1. We support and recognize each other with dignity and respect.
2. We affirm our strengths while working on our weaknesses.
3. We maintain high expectations.
4. We all grow from our mistakes and are willing to accept change.
5. We use humor and laugh with each other.
6. We embrace active learning because we are active learners.
7. We always keep sight of the *Big Picture*.
8. We acknowledge the presence of others, if simply with a smile.
9. We maintain a safe and caring environment.
10. Our decisions are based on what is best for student growth.

University of Central Florida

Horizon Middle School

Appendix E

HMS Operating Principles

with

Defining Statements

Horizon Middle School

Operating Principles

We, the faculty, staff and admoinistration of Horizon Middle School, do agree to support and enrich our students, our culture and our relationships to each other by affirming and practicing these, our operating principles.

1. **We support and recognize each other with dignity and respect.**
   Professionalism is the cornerstone of our practice.

2. **We affirm our strengths while working on our weaknesses.**
   Constructive criticism, balanced with genuine concern and affirmation.

3. **We maintain high expectations.**
   To maintain high expectations through encouragement, modeling and ethical behavior.

4. **We all grow from our mistakes and are willing to accept change.**
   We accept that personal growth is a learning process that involves mistakes, failures consequences and change.

5. **We use humor and laugh with each other.**
   We will laugh with each other, yet never use it as a weapon.

6. **We embrace active learning because we are active learners.**
   We strive to be active learners through individual responsibility toward our own learning activities and fostering them in students.

7. **We always keep sight of the *Big Picture*.**
   Accept that we don't always know the Big Picture, because it is a growing 3-D puzzle that is never ending.

8. **We acknowledge the presence of others, if simply with a smile.**
   We recognize that each person is an integral, vital, valuable part of Horizon Middle School and treat them accordingly.

9. **We maintain a safe and caring environment.**
   We establish fair limits and boundaries that allow everyone to feel safe.

10. **Our decisions are based on what is best for student growth.**
    *The bottom line is - our students are **top priority**.*

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